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ABSTRACT

This report concludes that the house plan should be the centerpiece of a systematic restructuring of New York City neighborhood high schools to reduce the dropout rate and improve academic achievement. The house plan is based on the subdivision of one or more grades into smaller schools within schools. Long-term monitoring of New York City dropout prevention programs found that those strategies, based on targeting limited numbers of at-risk students for remediation and support for limited time periods, failed because they returned students to the same overwhelming system that defeated them in the first place. New York's large, impersonal high school organization breeds alienation and isolation, its curriculum is broad rather than deep, and its management is autocratic rather than participatory. Well-conceived house plans offer the following advantages: (1) intimate environments that promote interaction among staff and students; (2) cohesive educational programs reinforced by interdisciplinary teaching; (3) personal, ongoing staff support; (4) student and staff involvement in decision making; and (5) encouragement of wide participation in extracurricular activities. House plans have not been successfully implemented throughout the system over the past 2 years, despite a mandate from the New York City Board of Education, due to resistance at the school level, lack of forceful leadership, and inadequate funding from the central level. Until the Board of Education puts its full weight behind the house plan program, it is in danger of becoming one small effort among many other uncoordinated dropout prevention and restructuring initiatives. A table illustrating the key features of the house system is included, and a table comparing the effects of different types of house plans on students is appended. (FMW)

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RESTRUCTURING NEIGHBORHOOD HIGH SCHOOLS: The House Plan Solution

A report of the
Public Education Association
and the
Bank Street College of Education

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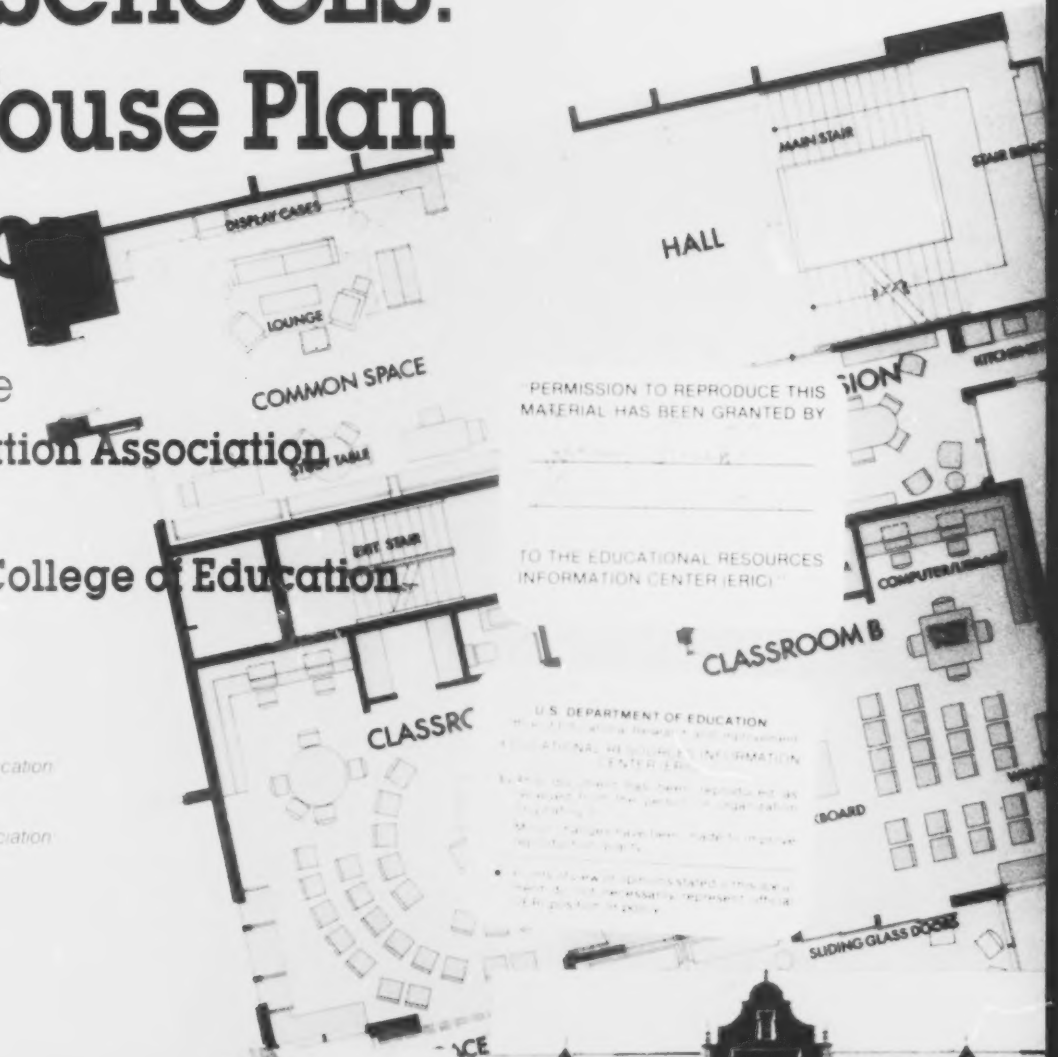

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report makes specific recommendations for restructuring New York City's neighborhood high schools as lead strategies for curtailing the high school dropout rate and improving high school achievement. The recommendations reflect an in-depth study of the high school system's second year implementation of house plans -- i.e., the subdivision of one or more grades into smaller schools within schools. The study includes reflections on the funding and building programs that have given the house plan program too little support and considers the benefits and prospects of house plans in terms of their interface with other high school dropout prevention strategies. The overall conclusion is that the house plan should be the centerpiece of a systematic program of neighborhood high school restructuring.

The underlying premise of these recommendations, documented in the Public Education Association's (PEA) long-term monitoring of New York City dropout prevention programs, is that the strategies those programs largely pursued of targeting limited numbers of at-risk students for remediation and support for limited time periods only to return them to the same overwhelming system that defeated them in the first place is a waste. Having concluded that nothing short of restructuring the whole school would counter the negative aspects of the system, we undertook a two-year collaboration, involving policy analysis by PEA and original research by the Bank Street College of Education, to test and elaborate the hypothesis that the house plan is the most viable way to accomplish the radical changes that must be made.

The idea of the house plan is in marked contrast to New York City's large, bureaucratic, impersonal high school organization--a structure that breeds alienation and isolation, whose curriculum is broad rather than deep and whose school management is autocratic rather than participatory. Well-conceived house plans subdivide schools into physically discrete smaller units creating intimate environments that promote interaction among staff and students. They take advantage of the opportunities provided by the smaller settings and work groups to create cohesive educational programs reinforced by interdisciplinary teaching; enable staff to offer personal, ongoing support to students and each other; involve staff and students in the decision-making process; and encourage wide participation in extra-curricular activities.

Two years ago the Board of Education called for the creation of houses in the high schools, setting itself on the cutting edge of

reform. Despite the mandate, however, effective implementation of house plans throughout the system has not happened. Resistance at the school level and a lack of forceful leadership and adequate funding from the central level have militated against house plans' reaching their full potential. Most available funds have instead been used for other dropout prevention and restructuring initiatives that are not coordinated either with each other or with the house plan program. Moreover, the Board of Education's capital plan continues to project the building of new large schools, while its modernization program fails to provide for the physical changes appropriate to the introduction of house plans in old buildings.

Until the Board of Education puts its full weight behind the house plan program, it is in danger of becoming one small effort among many instead of the needed centerpiece of dropout prevention and schoolwide neighborhood high school reform.

The following is a summary of recommendations that address these problems; details of the recommendations appear at the end of the report.

I. Neighborhood zoned high schools should be reorganized into small houses with restructured staffing patterns and updated curriculum and instructional formats. The high school authorities should affirm the need for these changes, define and clarify their characteristics, and provide technical assistance in implementation to school-based planning teams.

II. The restructuring of neighborhood zoned high schools into houses should take account of the special educational needs of overage and marginal students as well as current uncertainty as to determine how best to meet them

III. House Plan development should be funded primarily, though not exclusively, by refocusing existing resources.

IV. The school buildings program should be reoriented to ensure that new high schools are smaller and to facilitate division of new and old high schools into houses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A few years ago the main ideas in this report were regarded as iconoclastic and possibly unreasonable by most policymakers in New York City education. That they are far advanced today and voiced firmly and publicly by a new schools administration owes much to the people who participated in shaping this document.

Diana Oxley, research scientist and co-director of the PEA/Bank Street collaborative that produced the findings spotted the importance of schoolwide reform and house plans early on and made it her mission and ours to determine how they could be implemented. The sections of the document dealing with house plans report her findings and conclusions based on two years of research. We are grateful to have been her colleagues in studying and advocating these issues.

The discussion of other dropout prevention programs and alternative educational options in the report reflects research organized by Diana and conducted by Ken Jewell and Flavia Diaz. We thank them and Suzanne McIntyre for their contributions.

It was Joan Griffin McCabe, PEA Project Director, who brought the importance of house plans to wider public attention and mounted the campaign which kept the city's interest in them alive after the departure of Professor Frank Smith, of Teachers College, as director of the Division of High Schools, who introduced them. For two years, Joan worked skillfully and tirelessly to raise the consciousness of media, government policymakers, school people, and educational advocates to the critical importance of "thinking small."

Many others at PEA -- including public information director, Judith Baum, new high school project director Kym Vanderbilt; president Mary Ellen Fahs, and a core of loyal volunteers -- participated in shaping the report and its recommendations. Above all, however, our readers are indebted to editor Muriel Vitriol.

An experienced, professional editor, PEA Board member, and volunteer extraordinaire, Muriel assumed the awesome job of integrating Joan's outline and policy analysis with the Bank Street research. We are filled with admiration and appreciation for her work.

Jeanne S. Frankl
June 1, 1990

I. INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, New York City set itself on the cutting edge of school reform by calling for the creation of small schools--or houses--within large schools. The so-called house plan initiative, which ideally creates an environment that encourages personal relationships between students and staff, curriculum and teaching innovations, and administrative flexibility, was a notable commitment by the central administration to systemic reform of New York City's high schools, particularly the troubled comprehensive neighborhood schools.

After the first year of the house plan mandate, the Public Education Association and the Bank Street College of Education (PEA/Bank Street) issued a report based on a year-long study of the forty-three high schools that had dropout prevention programs. All but two of these schools (Jane Addams and Samuel Gompers, both vocational schools) were neighborhood comprehensive high schools. We focused on the dropout prevention schools because of our long-held determination that small schools and the kind of restructuring that house plans foster are necessary corollaries to dropout prevention. (See Effective Dropout Prevention: The Case for Schoolwide Reform, 1988, by PEA) Our purpose was to study the dynamics of house plans to learn how they should best be constituted to be effective with our most disadvantaged and low-achieving students.

Despite the mandate, our study revealed that the high schools did not receive adequate funding and support to implement the house plan system; that they received little technical assistance to facilitate the transition from the traditional organization to a house plan organization; and that the time allotted for planning and review was too short. In all fairness, no one realized the magnitude of change required to effect the transition; thus, resistance at the school level plus lack of physical space also militated against proper implementation. We concluded that

> ...the house plan was not recognized for what it is--the foundation for restructuring high schools. School staff made only limited attempts to organize education programs and services around the houses. The consequences were clear; their first year house plans fell far short of the goal to provide a smaller, more personal environment. (Making Big High Schools Smaller, McCabe and Oxley, p. 14)

Our current report, which follows below, begins where the first report, Making Big High Schools Smaller, leaves off. Because our enthusiastic support of the house plan stems from our long-term study of dropout prevention initiatives, this report also focuses on schoolwide reform strategies targeted for selective high schools, as well as the main approaches to dropout prevention, especially support systems for overage students. These approaches are discussed from our perspective that rather than compete with one another for funding and support, the programs should provide mutual reinforcement by becoming part of a cohesive strategy to ensure not only availability and delivery of services to every student who needs help, but also to avoid wasteful duplication and inadequate measures. We suggest that the house plan, serving as the umbrella under which these various programs could function, is a viable alternative to the scattershot way the various options are now being administered.

In our study of the second year of the house plan, we refine the key elements of a well-designed house plan, based on research and a review of the literature; discuss its impact on students and teachers; and identify obstacles to implementation along with possible solutions and implications of long-term planning.

While we are aware that academic achievement as a direct result of the house plan organization cannot be easily quantified in the short run, we remain committed to it because of its clear potential for downscaling school size, decentralizing school administration and empowering teachers, integrating curriculum, and providing a built-in support system. We are convinced such changes enhance student persistence and learning.

Resistance to change dies hard and, admittedly, transition to the house plan is not easy for most schools. In spite of some successes, it became obvious that the house plan did not flourish systemwide as hoped this second year because of continued opposition at the school level and lack of muscle at central headquarters. Yet, with genuine commitment and effective implementation, plus the will to overcome obstacles inherent in the radical restructuring effort, the house plan can become the antidote to our failing schools.

However, the house plan is not only for failing schools. Our research shows that students who attend high schools in which dropping out is not a problem and high achievement the norm also benefit from the house plan organization, especially in the ninth and tenth grades, by easing the transition to high school among other things.

The last section of the report is a discussion of funding policies that have fragmented high school reform in the past, reflecting the absence of an overall strategy. Also, the Board of Education's capital plan, which once again provides for building overlarge schools that do not include ready adaptability to the small school concept is a great disappointment when, as our research unequivocally makes clear, smallness, with the reforms it makes possible, is the indispensable attribute of dropout prevention.

2. WHAT OUR RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT THE HOUSE PLAN SYSTEM

New York City high schools are faulted for being large, bureaucratic, impersonal institutions, unresponsive to students and staff, breeding a sense of alienation and isolation, whose curriculum is fragmented and broad rather than deep and whose school management based on autocratic, top-down decision-making is widely viewed as divisive and ineffective.

A well-designed house plan counters these criticisms by:

1. creating small school environments in which staff and students interact with each other in small, stable groups, and in which ample opportunity exists for students to participate in extracurricular activities;

2. structuring educational formats to provide coordinated and cohesive instruction in which teachers work as members of a cross-disciplinary team;

3. fostering management systems that include staff and students in the decision-making process;

4. providing support systems for the students that promise continuity and personal relationships; and

5. adapting physical facilities so that they contribute to a small school feeling by organizing staff and students of each house into separated areas.

HOUSE PROFILES IN BRIEF

In this study, we analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of house plans in four different high schools, how they were implemented, and what effect they had on staff and student.

Each school's house plan is described briefly below. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality, a condition of schools' participation in research.

Manhattan Large

Manhattan Large, with a loosely structured house plan, has a student population of 3,000, largely Hispanic with many of limited English proficiency. Its house plan is organized vertically, with

students in grades nine to twelve in the same house. School administrators had developed a house system based on particular academic problems one year before the Board of Education's mandate. Their first step after the mandate was to make each of the school's existing academic programs into a house by assigning as nearly a full complement of support staff--including house coordinator, deans, counselors, and family assistants--to each house as possible. The house designations, if not curriculum related, had a career theme, such as Business.

The programs with categorical funding, such as the bilingual program, already had support staff, such as guidance counselors or family assistants. In other cases, at-large guidance counselors were given specific house assignments. Similarly, house coordinators were program supervisors. Although some deans retained their buildingwide assignments, most support staff were reorganized around houses. House offices, sometimes a converted classroom, were established to locate all support staff of a house together.

Teachers were not assigned to houses except in the special education and dropout prevention houses. This practice had less to do with design than the complexity of class scheduling.

Houses varied in size, from 1,000 students in the West house (formerly the bilingual program) to 450 in the Medical/Health house.

Each house coordinator organized extracurricular activities to encourage recognition and involvement. These did not duplicate the schoolwide program, but instead consisted of such activities as awards assemblies and field trips. Some houses sported T shirts with house insignia, and some published newsletters.

Brooklyn Large

Brooklyn Large, whose vertically structured house plan is also viewed as loosely organized, although about the same size as Manhattan Large, with 3,000 students, has a predominately black student population and a smaller proportion of students with limited English proficiency. Its house system is formed around three new sub-schools--Humanities, Science, and Business--and a long-established performing arts program as the fourth sub-school. Students may select one of the first three sub-schools, but must audition for the fourth.

Under the Brooklyn plan, students take the same core courses across the sub-schools, but are exposed to special curricular emphasis corresponding to the sub-school name. Although categorical programs

have been retained, the principal has tried to integrate them into the sub-school plan by assigning them to different sub-schools where the students being served may take some of their courses.

Assistant principals in charge of the academic departments represented in the sub-schools act as supervisors, and a teacher from each department serves as sub-school coordinator. In some cases, the assistant principal, coordinator, and paraprofessional(s) share the department office, which serves as the sub-school hub. Sub-school classrooms are located near the office.

Unlike Manhattan Large, support staff are only partially organized around the sub-schools, retaining schoolwide responsibilities in addition to their sub-school assignments. A small core of teachers is assigned to each sub-school, typically one in each core subject area per grade; they teach some but not necessarily all their classes in the sub-school.

The student support system is managed chiefly by reducing the class size to twenty-five and by having teachers act as case managers for one period a day in place of teaching a class.

In the Humanities sub-school, an entirely different teaching format was developed for ninth graders to ease their transition to high school. Two clusters of 100 students, each subdivided into classes of 25 and taught by a team of ninth-grade teachers, are headed by a ninth-grade coordinator. Students are blocked together to allow for double periods of English/Social Studies and Math/Science and the possibility of team teaching. Clusters run on a different schedule from the rest of the school for part of the day and are located in one wing of the building, where the coordinator's office is also located. (The Humanities sub-school is tightly structured, even though Brooklyn Large, itself, is viewed as loosely structured.) As in Manhattan Large, the coordinator organizes extracurricular activities for the sub-schools.

Bronx Intermediate

At Bronx Intermediate, whose ninth-grade house plan is viewed as tightly organized, the nearly 1,700 students are roughly two-thirds Hispanic and the rest black. Unlike the vertical plans of Manhattan Large and Brooklyn Large, Bronx Intermediate's is a horizontal plan whereby students of the same grade level are grouped together.

A full complement of support staff, comprised of assistant principal, house coordinator (grade advisor), guidance counselor, dean, and

paraprofessional, is assigned to each house and remains with the same students for their four years of high school.

Although houses are not differentiated according to curriculum, curriculum reform is the centerpiece of the house plan, a result of the recently revised Chapter 1 elegibility that allows use of extra funds to create a schoolwide, intensified academic program if 75 percent or more students in the school meet the poverty criteria.

Beginning with the ninth grade, students are organized into clusters of 100 that are subdivided into classes of 25. Teams of four teachers are assigned to each cluster, teaching their required five classes within the cluster in classrooms located in a single area of the building. Students in each class are blocked together for six periods each day, including lunch.

Members of the teacher teams have up to three free periods, including lunch, but are required to meet together only once a week. Teacher teams are expected to develop an integrated core curriculum.

One class in each cluster is designated an honors class to create more homogeneous grouping. At the same time, at-risk students, included in heterogeneous classes, are viewed as receiving the same level of support as provided in dropout prevention programs without the stigma of labeling. Bilingual and special education students are served in separate programs.

When students enter tenth grade, they are again assigned to a class of 25 within a 100-student cluster and to a four-member teacher team.

Bronx Small

Bronx Small, with the most loosely structured house plan studied, but with a student population of 1,000 is also the smallest school. Nearly all students are Hispanic and a large proportion are limited English proficient.

Ninth- and tenth-grade students--except for those assigned to bilingual or special education programs--at the time of our study were placed in class-size groups that met with a teacher coordinator for one period a day. Each group had a career interest, such as business or health. The format of the classes was informal, with students actively participating in discussions related to their career theme, as well as to personal and social concerns relative to their age group. Coordinators worked closely together, exchanging classes to expose all students to the individual coordinator's area of expertise. No other special arrangements with support or teaching staff were made for these students. (Bronx Small has now implemented a more comprehensive house plan.)

HOW WE ASSESSED THE HOUSE PLANS

A house plan system having all the key features listed at the beginning of this section would constitute a tightly structured system. Since none of the schools we studied had all the key features, it became a matter of degree, reflecting different modes of reorganization and different strategies used to achieve the same goal. The main difference among them was the degree or depth of the intervention. We viewed a house as tightly structured if it had its own support system and an instructional component that provided cross-disciplinary team teaching. A loose structure in our view was one that had its own support system but was missing the instructional format.

As we can see from the profiles, the differences in organization are notable: Two schools' house systems--both of which we view as loosely structured (although one of the houses within the system had developed a tight structure)--are designed on a vertical structure, where students in grades nine to twelve are in the same house; one--viewed as tightly structured--has a horizontal plan, where students at the same grade level are grouped together in a house; and one school has a loose, informal organization, but reaps the benefits of a more comprehensive plan becauses of its relatively small size. The small school was included in the study to allow comparison with large schools that are trying to achieve the advantages of smallness through the house system.

We broke down the key features of a well-designed house plan into five units to assess the house plans under study: instruction, student support, extracurricular activities, physical features, and house management.

Specifically, regarding instruction, students and interdisciplinary staff should be organized into houses of not more than 500 students; the house should have a heterogeneous mix of students (not tracked according to ability), with students remaining in the house throughout their high school career. Houses should be subdivided into instructional units having an interdisciplinary teaching team that shares a group of students for instruction, that develops a coordinated curriculum, and that meets regularly as a group.

As to the other features, each house should have its own permanent support staff; its own program of extracurricular activities; its own physical area that allows students to take courses and meet with staff in close proximity; and its own management team and operating budget. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Key Features of the House System

Instruction

House Unit Structure:

1. Students and interdisciplinary staff are organized into houses (of not more than 500 students) for instruction;

2. Houses are not based on differing abilities;

3. Students remain in the same house across grade levels.

Sub-Unit Structure:

4. The house is subdivided into instructional units containing an interdisciplinary team of teachers who share a group of students in common for instruction;

5. Teacher teams develop a coordinated curriculum;

6. The day/week is structured to give teams time to meet as a group.

Student Support

7. Support staff are permanently linked to each house.

Extracurricular Activities

8. Extracurricular activities are organized within each house.

Physical Facilities

9. Physical facilities allow students to take most courses and meet with staff in physical proximity.

House Management

10. Houses are managed by their own staffs and have an operating budget.

Manhattan Large and Bronx Small, with loosely organized house systems, are examples in which staff have been organized to provide students with more effective support, while leaving the academic programs intact. The Humanities sub-school of Brooklyn Large and the ninth grade house of Bronx Intermediate, examples of more tightly organized house systems, combined student support systems with a partly restructured academic program.

IMPACT OF HOUSE SYSTEMS ON STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Impact on Students

We assessed the impact of the house plans in the four different schools on students in four areas: their social relationships with peers and staff, extracurricular participation, feelings about school, and attendance and academic records. (See Appendix for the statistical breakdown.) Summarized below are the finding of the research reported in the full report, An Analysis of House Systems in New York City Neighborhood High Schools:

Peer relationships. Students were least familiar with one another in the loosely structured houses of the large schools. The degree of familiarity with one another was about equal in the tightly structured houses and in the small school.

Teacher relationships. Students in the loosely structured houses of the large schools had the weakest ties to teachers. Students in the tightly structured house in the large school and students in the smallest school had the strongest ties; they reported knowing about a third of their teachers.

Support staff relationships. Up to five support staff were assigned to houses, including a guidance counselor, a house coordinator, supervising assistant principal, grade advisor or dean, and paraprofessional. Only students in the tightly structured houses at Bronx Intermediate had all five support staff to draw upon exclusively. Students in the other houses had four support staff, but these were not always exclusively assigned to the students' house. However, students interacted chiefly with just two support staff, usually the house coordinator and guidance couselor or, in the case of one house, grade advisor.

Students' ratings of familiarity/interaction with their house coordinator were lowest in the loosely structured houses in the large schools, highest in the tightly structured houses at the intermediate-size school and the loosely structured small school, and in the middle in the tightly structured house in the large school.

Students' ratings of their guidance counselor were highest in the tightly structured intermediate-size school, in the middle in the loosely structured small school, and lowest in the loosely structured large school. Even lower was the rating given the counselor in the tightly structured house in the large school, probably because the counselor was not exclusively assigned to the house. In contrast, the grade advisor, who was exclusively assigned to the house, received a rating closer to that received by the other students' counselors.

Students' ratings of the assistant principal in charge of the house were uniformly low across house types, as were student ratings of paraprofessionals.

Extracurricular activities. The number of extracurricular activities in which students participated ranged widely from a high 9.83 average in the tightly structured house in the intermediate-size school to a low 2.57 average in the loosely structured houses in the large schools. Students in the tightly structured house in the large school participated in an average of 5.14 activities, about as many as students in the loosely structured small school, with 5.89.

Sense of community was highest among students in the tightly structured house of the large school and the tightly structured intermediate school, and lowest in the loosely structured large and small schools. However, with regard to school climate (not shown on chart), students rated it relatively best at the loosely structured small school, medium at the tightly structured intermediate school, and lowest at the loosely structured large schools.

Attendance. The number of days students were absent during the spring semester was about the same across house types. Students' self-report of whether they cut classes from time to time, however, differed significantly: Students in the loosely structured large school and tightly structured intermediate-size school cut classes with roughly the same frequency and more often than students in the loosely structured small school and tightly structured house in the large school, whose reports were about the same.

Academic performance. Students in the loosely structured large schools earned the fewest course credits; students in the tightly structured houses fell in the middle; and students in the loosely structured small school earned the most. Similarly, students in the loosely structured large schools were promoted less often than students in any of the other schools. Students in the tightly structured intermediate-size school appear to have the highest promotion rate, but the finding is misleading given that staff had eased promotion standards during the study year. These students'

relative rate of promotion probably corresponds more closely to the relative number of credits they earned. Students' average grades for courses they took did not differ significantly across house types. In order to strengthen the argument that these finding are due to house type and not preexisting differences in student ability, the eighth-grade reading scores of the standardized Degrees of Reading Power test were analyzed and did not show significant differences across house types.

Tightly versus Loosely Structured Houses

Even though none of the schools studied had all the key elements we enumerated for optimum success, it became clear that house systems that organize schooling around houses--instruction as well as support and student activities--have a more favorable impact on students than ones that do not. (See Appendix 1 for a statistical breakdown.)

Also, a comparison of tightly versus loosely structured house types in schools of the same size provides the clearest indication of the superiority of the tightly structured houses. Interestingly, the impact of the small school is quite similar to those found for tightly structured houses. This suggests that the stronger house systems established in the larger schools provided more student support than the large schools with weak house systems, but still are not strong enough to outperform the small school with a weak house system.

These findings conform to the theory that smallness is the common denominator of successful dropout prevention efforts; that students derive social and academic benefits from the tightly organized house plan largely because it creates a small school environment in a large school. This in no way diminishes the need for the other components of a well-designed house, especially a revamped educational format; it merely points out that smallness is a critical factor in the way students relate to their school, the staff, and to each other--laying the groundwork for effective dropout prevention--which is borne out by the loosely organized control school, Bronx Small.

Impact on Teachers

With regard to the effects of the house plan system on teachers, we found that the design of tightly structured houses had a more positive impact on students than on teachers. With the exception of teachers' greater familiarity with students' all-around academic performance, attributed, no doubt, to the team teaching component operating in these houses, there was no expected positive effect that

in theory should have been measurable.

The lack of desired effect on staff of the tightly structured houses we studied points up the weaknesses in house management in all the house systems. Houses enjoyed little autonomy, and house staff were not empowered to respond directly to issues arising within the house. Moreover, the interdisciplinary teaching teams were weakened by their conflicts with academic departments. The following section identifies barriers that relate to weaknesses in house management.

SCHOOL-LEVEL OBSTACLES

To override the inherent difficulties in the transition from a traditional high school organization to the house plan system requires a new mind-set. The student-centered house system cannot coexist with traditional, subject centered schooling. For example, the assistant principals at Manhattan Large were largely unsupportive of the house plan because they felt the emphasis was on student support rather than academic achievement, and while we do not wish to minimize their concern with the instructional element, which is indeed crucial, it does indicate the kind of re-thinking that must take place if the house plan is to succeed.

We have listed below the most serious obstacles to a house system, which include (1) a curriculum that is broken up into many specialized courses, tracks, and programs, (2) an academic department structure that, alone, drives curriculum development and staff supervision (3) a system of student support predicated upon the needs of a large school, (4) additional expense of providing extracurriculars at the house level, and (5) lack of proper physical space:

1. Problems with Curriculum

   (a) In most cases there are too many courses for a house plan system: The large number of specialized courses due to multiple tracks, electives, and funded and remedial programs create insufficient numbers of students for the same number of courses within houses.

      Possible Solutions: Instead of tracking students, create heterogeneous classes of mixed ability; generalize the curriculum, eliminating some electives.

(b) Teacher specialization in instruction at particular grade levels creates need to fill course loads by teaching outside the house, thus undermining the house concept.

Possible Solutions: Have teachers instruct across all grade levels; when teachers who usually teach lower level courses are required to teach higher level courses, have higher level teachers provide staff development if needed.

(c) Rigid curriculum and testing requirements restrict development of interdisciplinary curriculum.

Possible Solutions: Obtain permission for temporary suspension of requirements; create additional instruction time to accommodate new curriculum.

2. Problem with Academic Department

Conflicts with academic department assistant principals' authority strip house supervisors of ability to develop curriculum and organize house staff into interdisciplinary units.

Possible Solutions: Make house supervisor principal of the house, with school principal over all the houses; or otherwise give house supervisor authority over instructional staff equal to academic supervisors' curricular authority.

3. Problem with Support Staff

Because the traditional system of student support assigns specialists to focus on specific student problems and does not systematically involve teachers, support services are not easily integrated into houses, which are predicated on general, ongoing support.

Possible Solutions: Create house support teams of generalists headed by guidance counselors; or maintain specialized functions at house level, but also assign support staff to house teacher teams.

4. Problem with Providing Extracurricular Activities

Organizing extracurricular activities at the house level creates the need for additional funds.

Possible Solution: The scope of schoolwide extra-curricular activities may be reduced and the savings applied at the house level.

5. Problem with Physical Space Needs

Building structure may not permit houses to be established in physically separate areas.

Possible Solutions: Classroom clusters for teacher teams can be established whatever the physical structure; seek funds for architectural changes to accommodate houses.

Implications for Planning

It is clear from the problems enumerated above that, first and foremost, a heavy investment in staff development is needed. In addition, there must be a re-thinking not only of scheduling to accommodate structure and curricular requirements, but also of staffing. For example, one option implies that the function of the assistant principal be reassessed and another that a new teaching ladder be created. Also, the kind of support staff required by the house plan differs from the narrower focus of support staff serving large schools, and that must be addressed. Further, collaborative management and team teaching imply that there be regular meeting times, affecting time spent in the classroom. Accommodating the changes that will have to be made means that there will be trade-offs, and that a mechanism for developing a consensus and strengthening house unity must be put in place.

CENTRAL-LEVEL OBSTACLES

On the central level, the frequent leadership changes within the Board of Education particularly affect high school programs, since high schools are under its jurisdiction. The two separate, time-consuming searches for a chancellor have not helped matters, nor has the fact that the house plan initiative was introduced by an executive director who left before schools had a change to implement it, and subsequent directors have provided varying levels of commitment.

Further, the house plan competes with many other existing programs to improve high schools. As a result, the kind of guidance, moral support, and technical assistance needed to help schools implement

houses has not been forthcoming. Also, despite avowals to the contrary, the Board of Education has not thus far shown a commitment to the small school concept, apparently believing that largeness can be countered with special programs and funding. We hope this strategy will not persist under the new administration.

3. THE SLOW MOVEMENT TOWARD SCHOOLWIDE REFORM

In spite of the burgeoning number of dropout prevention programs nationwide and in New York City (here, alone, there are at least eighteen discrete programs that fall under the rubric "dropout prevention"), there is scant evidence that they have substantially reduced the dropout rate.

Since the 1984-85 school year, New York City has had dropout prevention in its schools. Now that it has become painfully clear that the "band-aid" approach will not work when the entire school is a breeding ground for failure, the strategy is evolving from one of targeting a limited number of at-risk students in a school for a limited amount of time, to a concept of restructuring the whole school, long advocated by PEA/Bank Street. In theory, at least, this is the direction in which dropout prevention is moving.

With the help of input of studies of New York City's dropout prevention programs by PEA/Bank Street; the Board of Education's Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment (OREA); and Columbia's Teachers College, the Board of Education formulated new guidelines in 1989 to benefit the "whole" school. (See Effective Dropout Prevention: The Case for Schoolwide Reform, 1988, by PEA; Memorandum to the Office of Collaborative Studies, New York City Board of Education 1989, from PEA/Bank Street; The AIDP End-of-Year Report, 1987-88, by OREA; The Evaluation of the New York City Dropout Prevention Program, Final Report, Year 2, 1986-87, by Teachers College; and Memorandum to the Office of Collaborative Studies, New York City Board of Education, 1989, from Teachers College.)

Each of the reports concentrated on different issues of dropout prevention: OREA focused on credit granting, assessment practices, and alternative educational opportunities as particularly significant; Teachers College focused on the broad goals of increased student engagement and improved student academic performance; and PEA/Bank Street focused on ways to make programs work. All reports concluded that effective dropout prevention must include the whole school in its planning.

As a first step, the Board of Education established levels to identify schools' readiness and ability to adopt changes in their schools.

Level-one schools were to provide one or more discrete activities

designed to promote school engagement, improved attendance, academic achievement, and high school completion for at-risk students. Twenty-three of the forty-three high schools receiving dropout prevention funding were at level one.

Level-two schools were to implement a broad range of activities that would either begin or contribute to a comprehensive change process. Sixteen of the forty-three high schools were at level two.

Level-three schools were to implement a comprehensive change process. These schools were to have a long-range plan for school restructuring. Not only were they to demonstrate a unified approach to resource allocation, they were also to have a broad range of programs for all students, involvement of parents and students in planning, a commitment to strengthen and expand the house plan, and the existence of a fully functioning school-based planning team. Thus, they represented a new interest in schoolwide reform. However, only four of the forty-three high schools were at level three.

One sign of intention to coordinate the different dropout prevention programs, at least, was the 1989 decision to consolidate them under one office. Earlier, the state-funded Attendance Improvement/ Dropout Prevention (AIDP) and the city's Dropout Prevention Program (DPP) were at long last merged after four years of operating independently of each other, so that successful aspects of both programs would benefit high schools that had either program.

THE CHANCELLOR SCHOOLS

In its 1989-90 budget request, the Board of Education finally focused on restructuring high schools. It sought funding to mount renewal efforts in the neighborhood high schools entailing widesweeping changes. According to the Board of Education budget document:

> Incremental improvements, however, are inadequate responses for many unsuccessful schools. We need to restructure the schools immediately. Students who depend upon them for their futures cannot wait for them to get better. (A New Direction, 1989/90 Budget Request, New York City Board of Education, p. 29)

The Board initially proposed three schools to be models of renewal: the sub-school (house) model, the institute (house) model, and the "community tower" (special-service community school) model.

Prior to the budget request, the then chancellor had assembled a task force on high school admissions and quality, in which PEA advocated

that high school initiatives focus schoolwide reforms on the poorest neighborhood high schools. A direct result of the work of the task force was the adoption in April, 1989, of a resolution by the members of the Board of Education to improve the neighborhood high schools. It stated that

> the Executive Director of the Division of High Schools, during the three-year period commencing with the 1989-90 school year, shall designate not less than five specific high schools each year which, in his judgment, are most in need of educational improvement, and shall devlop and implement plans to address the specific needs identified. (Board of Education, Resolution No. 29, April, 1989--Appendix C)

Armed with these mandates, the Division of High Schools set to work to develop concrete plans for improving the neighborhood high schools. A minimum of fifteen high schools was to be "renewed" within the following three years.

However, without specific guidelines in place, the Division of High Schools selected the first five high schools for renewal: Prospect Heights and Eastern District in Brooklyn, Theorore Roosevelt in the Bronx, Washington Irving in Manhattan, and Franklin K. Lane in Queens. It was envisioned that administrative staff would meet during the summer and develop renewal plans to begin in the fall, 1989, term.

One of PEA/Bank Street's recommendations in Making Big High Schools Smaller was for a comprehensive plan to implement the house plan in the most troubled high schools in an orderly process over a period of five years. We maintained that ten schools per year was a realistic number of schools to work with. Thus, when the Board of Education adopted the resolution to renew five high schools each year for three years we willingly settled for half. We were also encouraged by the changes proposed by the Division of High Schools for these schools. They were evidence that the division took the renewal effort seriously and acknowledged that to make a real, meaningful difference sweeping changes (level three) must take place.

For example, one proposal called for the renewal schools to do the following: (1) Create a school planning team; (2) eliminate grade designations; (3) record only credit gained by students; (4) create management consultant teams between the existing renewed schools and one of the new schools; and (5) transfer one-third of the teaching staff from the school, in consultation with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). (Division of High Schools Memo, March 13, 1989 [Appendix].)

As of fall, 1989, the original three model renewal high schools designated by the Board of Education continued to work agressively on school improvement. The five chancellor high schools began working at their school level and as a group, with the assistance of Martin Luther King, Jr., High School, one of the model schools, during the 1989-90 school year.

Renovating a school while keeping it open during the process is new at the high school level. Heretofore, New York City would close a school while it was undergoing major changes, reopening it for a new and different student and staff population. This renewal practice is an attempt to improve the school for the students who are currently in attendance and who have no other option. Although slow and undramatic, it may prove that it is not necessary to close a school to make radical changes.

Although at this juncture, all programs are on hold, awaiting reevaluation by the new administration, on looking back one can say that schoolwide reform is making haste slowly. Our main concern is that the house plan, which should be the centerpiece of dropout prevention and schoolwide reform, in most schools has been relegated to the status of another small effort among many. That thirty-nine of the forty-three schools receiving dropout prevention funding used only a portion of that money to support houses does not indicate real commitment. The reality is that with the exception of level-three schools (of which there are only four) and the chancellor schools (of which there are only five), the Board of education has yet to put its full weight behind the house plan systemwide. Until it does, schoolwide reform of the troubled neighborhood high schools will not happen.

4. OTHER OPTIONS: ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS FOR OVERAGE AND MARGINAL STUDENTS

One of the chief reasons for the abysmal record of dropout prevention efforts is the high percentage of overage students who are prone to dropping out and whose needs are not being met by the existing programs.

The range of the problem is apparent in a review of the statistics concerning overage students. In the forty-three dropout prevention high schools 70 percent of ninth graders, 69 percent of tenth graders, 66 percent of eleventh graders, and 55 percent of twelfth graders were two years overage for their grade level. The decline in percentage must be presumed to reflect the exceptional dropout rate of this overage population, which has been well documented by research.

The programs described below are designed to serve overage and marginal students who would benefit by flexible alternatives. However, as the review by the Bank Street research team makes clear, their potential has not been fully realized and they are too scattershot to have an impact on the dropout problem. Until they are made part of a comprehensive strategy, duplication, confusion, lack of coordination, and unsuitable course content will persist to hamper their effectiveness.

THE GENERAL EDUCATION DIPLOMA (GED) PROGRAM

The General Educational Diploma program, more frequently referred to as the High School Equivalency Diploma, offers at-risk students the opportunity to obtain a basic education preparation. A GED makes it possible for these students to get almost any civil service or apprenticeship job, enlist in the military, or be admitted into college. In other words, the GED is a valid equivalent to the high school diploma.

The program operates during the regular school year and summer. It prepares students in five basic subject areas: math, social studies, science, writing, and reading. In addition, students receive help in writing resumes and finding a job. The GED test is normed on how high school students do on it. New York State's minimum passing score is 225 points (with no one subject receiving lower than 40 points), which allows admittance to any of New York City's two-year colleges. The four-year city colleges require a score of 270, while the state universities require a score of 270 and a "good" SAT score. Private colleges and universities set their own GED requirements.

In New York State, to be enrolled in this program, a student must be at least sixteen years old, i.e., school-leaving age; he must have earned less than one-half of the credits expected per grade level; his class must have graduated; or he must have dropped out of secondary school.

In order for a school to start a GED program, the school must conform to specifications set forth by the state education department, which include: classes of no more than 20 students; 150 hours of instruction per year, with a minimum of 12 hours per week; ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction for limited English proficent students; and bilingual classes for students who qualify. To be admitted to a GED class, a student must be discharged from his school register, and a parent's written approval must be kept on file, unless the student is independent.

Long-term absentees (LTA) who qualify are referred to an on-site GED program, if there is one; if not, or if there is no room, they are referred to an off-site GED center. In either case, they are given a trial period before they are taken off the school register. If a student does not attend the program, he is marked absent on the register, contacted, and the referral process is started again.

New York State requires an eighth-grade reading level for a student to be placed in the GED program. If students fall below eighth-grade competency in any of the five subject areas, they are placed in a pre-GED class. According to the principal at Auxiliary Services headquarters, approximately 70 percent of the students referred to the program are placed in a pre-GED class for at least one of the five subject areas, where they work at their own pace receiving "individually prescribed" instruction until a test determines whether or not they are ready to go on to the next lesson and eventually the GED program.

Approximately nineteen of the forty-three AIDP/DPP high schools have an on-site GED program; other schools send their students to one of the GED programs throughout the city. Among the off-site programs run by the Board of Education, three of the largest are Auxiliary Services, Outreach, and Offsite. Citywide, Auxiliary Services operates twenty-six GED centers; Outreach, seven; and Offsite, forty-one. Twenty-six of these centers offer bilingual instruction as part of the GED preparation. According to the principal at the Auxiliary Services headquarters, some of its centers are linked to the Federation Educational and Guidance Services (FEGS) for job placement, while all Offsite centers use the FEGS job placement program, as do high schools with on-site GED programs. Outreach centers are not linked with FEGS, doing their own job referral instead.

Off-site GED programs are funded specially by the Board of Education, which sets aside a specific amount that is increased commensurate with their success. The funding for the on-site programs, on the other hand, is derived from the school's general funds, with the option of using a portion of the school's AIDP funds to help finance the program.

Evening GED Programs

There are twenty-four self-sustaining GED programs citywide that charge a fee of $35 to $40 to cover cost of material and teachers' salaries (the Board of Education pays the school principal and security guard). In addition to the regular GED program, other courses, such as real estate, belly dancing, and swimming, can cost $150 each; however, if a student can prove indigence, the fee is waived. Other evening GED programs, thirty-nine in all, are under the auspices of the Adult Education division of the Board of Education and are funded by the Board. Like the self-sustaining programs, these programs are housed in high schools, junior high schools, elementary schools, or community centers.

According to figures of the Adult Education division, the approximate cost of operating a GED class of fifteen students, which runs 150 hours a year (six hours a week for twenty-five weeks), is $9,000.

Assessment of the Program

The Board of Education now classifies students who go into a GED program as transfers rather than dropouts, due, according to a Board representative, to improved data-gathering methods that track students more efficiently. However, according to one of the principals of the Auxiliary Services program, the real reason for the reclassification is to reduce the academic schools' high dropout rate. In any case, the change helps alleviate the stigma associated with the program being a lesser alternative to the conventional four years of high school.

According to GED representatives interviewed by Bank Street, there is general agreement that the GED program is a viable alternative for overage or at-risk students because it offers the opportunity for them to acquire "marketable" skills. Other features cited as strengths of the program are that classes are smaller than in the regular classroom setting; that students may work at their own pace;

and that it is the only program that offers at-risk students the opportunity to obtain a high school equivalency diploma.

They also indicated that the program needed improvement. Suggestions included more and better training on group dynamics and work ethics; a change in the age requirements so that students over twenty-one could be served (those over twenty-one are referred to adult education); increasing the minimum passing score to be on a par with state programs; more skills-oriented equipment, such as computers; literacy labs to serve the many students who need literacy preparation; additional staff/counselors to do more career development, job awareness training, and/or college orientation (the two-month waiting period for GED scores could be used for this purpose); and better jobs and job training.

There is some empirical data indicating that GED holders do not do as well in college and are not viewed as favorably by some employers as high school graduates. A 1985 study conducted by Wisconsin University on the GED students' performance at work and at college found that by 1985, only 4 percent of the GED students who had entered the university in 1979-80 had graduated. Eighty-four percent of the GED students had dropped out, 11 percent were still enrolled, and 1 percent had transferred.

Two surveys conducted by the university asked employers whether they viewed the GED comparable to the high school diploma. In one survey 83 percent (N=53) of the respondents said that all things being equal they considered them the same. In the other survey, however, 31 percent (N=8) said that all factors being equal they would rather hire a high school graduate.

The Armed Forces, which is a major employer, has found that GED students with high aptitude test scores have higher attrition rates than high school graduates from the lowest scoring part of the graduating class. As a result, GED holders have to meet higher stndards to enter any branch of the military.

These findings seem compatible with the view of a New York City principal at Auxiliary Services headquarters, when asked to compare the GED with the regular diploma, that both had value--the GED has a higher competency requirement, while the high school diploma shows "consistency and endurance." Clearly, the observations warrant recognition of the GED program as a legitimate and valuable alternative for students. Yet it may also be advantageous for at least some students to integrate or articulate the program with a school setting that encourages a more sustained commitment to work and learning. Certainly the issue merits further research.

THE CONCURRENT OPTIONS PROGRAM

The Concurrent Options program, under the Alternative High School division of the Board of Education, serves students who are in the AIDP program or are AIDP eligible, whose average age is seventeen, and who are at least two grades behind in school. It is designed for students for whom attendance during regular school hours is difficult. The program is in thirty-four AIDP/DPP high schools.

Students in the program may take courses at their own school, if offered there, or off site at other high schools, adult education centers, community colleges, community-based organizations, or through a work-study program. In some cases, depending on the arrangement made with an employer, a student may be paid as well. Students work as secretaries, word processors, bank tellers, or in vocational trades. The schedule for these credit-earning options can vary from the regular school day and may be late afternoons, evenings, or weekends.

The Concurrent Options menu includes independent study, shared instruction, cooperative technical education classes, evening and summer schools, community college classes, P.M. schools, and community-based training.

Preliminary results of a survey conducted by the program's main office indicated that the options chosen most are independent study, P.M. Schools (after school program for making up failed courses or earning additional credit toward graduation), and evening/summer schools. According to a P.M. School coordinator interviewed, most students served at the P.M. School are at grade level, taking courses for extra credit, while marginal students, who need it the most, are reluctant to stay after school, despite the fact that they are contacted by letter and by phone. It is significant that most of the courses offered are regular academic courses that may not accommodate failing students. This also seems to be the case for the evening/summer schools, which offer remedial math and reading, science, and history.

Assessment of the Program

"Sixty-five percent of the students we intend to help, we really serve; that is, we help improve their attendance and obtain the credits they need." This was the assessment of the director of the Concurrent Options program. His goal is to have all of the academic comprehensive high schools offer Concurrent Options.

An important feature of the program is the on-site Concurrent Options counselor at the home schools, who is the link between the schools

and the off-site centers. (Unfortunately, only twenty-four of the thirty-four high schools that have the program receive extra funding to have a counselor on site.) This link helps to closely monitor students' achievement as well as ensure that they show up at the various off-site centers.

While it is encouraging that at least some of the AIDP/DPP high schools are offering alternatives intended to meet the needs of overage and marginal students, care is needed to avoid wasteful duplication, which may occur when a school receives funding from different sources and when there is no close coordination and communication with a central administrator. Furthermore, options such as the P.M. School and evening/summer school need to include a greater variety of compelling courses.

THE FEDERATION EMPLOYMENT GUIDANCE SERVICES (FEGS)

FEGS is a community-based organization (CBO) that offers dropout prevention services, vocational training, and educational services to AIDP/DPP students or students who are AIDP/DPP eligible. According to a FEGS coordinator, most of the students served by FEGS are overage for their grade by one or two years. The intent of the program is to offer older, career-oriented students as many vocational options as possible. In addition to the linkage with the GED programs mentioned above, nine AIDP/DPP high schools participate in this program, whose services include case management, diagnostic vocational evaluation, skills training, educational internships, career and vocational exploration, personal adjustment counseling, referral of students and their families to in-school and community resources, part-time job programs, home visits, seminars, field visits, and special activities. FEGS also has special programs for foster care and homeless students.

The Board of Education decides which schools will have the FEGS program, after schools submit proposals. Each year's contract with FEGS determines the number of students that will be served that year. The nine high schools that participate in this program served a total of 2,921 students in the 1988-89 school year.

Assessment of the Program

It is significant to note some of the problems with the FEGS skills training program, as pointed out by PEA's dropout prevention study. Only a few students who could benefit from such a program enroll for several reasons: traveling to the training center in Manhattan is inconvenient; the coordination of job programs is poor, causing competition among programs and duplication of jobs; and the work experience is not linked to academic learning. Furthermore, PEA

found problems with all CBO job-sponsored programs in that there are far more students than can be accommodated; that student quotas for the CBOs discourage these organizations from identifying more good jobs; and that many students work more than the minimum of ten hours, which interferes with their school work.

THE RE-ENTRY PROGRAM

The intent of this program is to offer students who enter school late in the semester because of having dropped out or being new to the system the opportunity to catch up and join the mainstream. Too often, latecomers attend classes for one or two days, become overwhelmed with the mainstream curriculum, and never return. The Re-Entry program classes are taught in a specific location in the school and the students get the individualized attention, the supportive environment, and the personalized programming they need. All this is done to make the transition into the mainstream easier.

Nine AIDP high schools have the Re-Entry program, which is funded through the AIDP program. This program focuses mainly on ninth and tenth graders. According to an AIDP coordinator at one of the schools, this program is not appropriate for all latecomers, such as students who are overage for their grade and have very few credits toward graduation. For example, a seventeen-year-old who has five credits in the tenth grade would be referred to the GED program.

Re-Entry students take four core courses--English, social studies, science, and math--and may take electives such as educational internships and courses in a trade or business school, or they may take a part-time job. Because of the customized schedule, which is set up after a conference with an AIDP counselor, students in the Re-Entry program have a shorter day than mainstream students, although there are "enrichment activities," such as field trips, guest speakers, group guidance sessions, and special projects. Parents, too, are strongly urged to participate in the program. A counselor decides when a student is ready to be moved into the mainstream.

Assessment of the Program

According to one of the program representatives, the close grouping of classes reduces the likelihood that students will cut classes during a class period change. In addition, students are taught all their core subjects by three to four teachers. This minischool format offers continuity, which is crucial to helping the re-entrants succeed.

The weaknesses in the program are the large class size, which may range from twenty-five to thirty-four, when, according to the counselor, there should be no more than twenty students to a class, and that once the students are mainstreamed they are again subjected to the overwhelming school environment that defeated them in the first place.

THE COMPREHENSIVE NIGHT HIGH SCHOOL

As its name implies, this school offers the same academic curriculum of the regular day comprehensive high school curriculum except that it is open at night. Like its counterpart, it includes preparation for the Regents exams, and to graduate, a student must have the same forty credits. It is for students under twenty-one who work during the day, who are teenage parents, who are overage, or who are recent immigrants.

The Manhattan Comprehensive Night High School, or the "Evening Express," has been operating since February, 1989; two more night high schools opened in the fall--one in the Bronx and the other in Brooklyn--and a fourth is scheduled for Queens this spring (1990).

The Evening Express has twenty staff persons and fourteen teachers who teach five courses. Some teachers may also have additional assignments, such as serving as deans.

Classes are offered Sunday through Thursday from 5:00 to 11:00 P.M. The school year (September to June) is divided into four cycles, at the beginning of which students may register. The school, which admits students from the five boroughs, has a yearly student capacity of 500 students. To be eligible, a student must be seventeen to twenty years old and in need of completing high school.

Students who work at an accelerated pace may take up to ten credits per semester, counting on the small-school environment to get help, if necessary, from the class paraprofessional or teacher team. In addition, an ESL/special education component and career counseling are included as part of the program, as are free dinners, transportation fare, and extracurriculars.

The director of the program is enthusiastic because the opportunity given to students during World War II to attend high school in the evening is available once again. "New York City high schools are filled with...students who must support themselves and their families," he said. "Not to give them the opportunity to go to school in the evening is criminal."

MISSING: A STRATEGY TO COORDINATE PROGRAMS

The alternative options strategy suffers from two deficiencies: a lack of arrangement to ensure that all students have access to the repertoire of options and a failure to integrate these programs into the supportive settings that most students, including many who are overage, need. That only one of the forty-three AIDP/DPP comprehensive high schools had on site all four daytime programs described above--GED, FEGS, Concurrent Options, and Re-Entry--may indicate that workable alternatives for students who for a variety of reasons are at risk of dropping out are not being served. (Three schools had three programs, nineteen had two programs, and fifteen had one program.)

The fact that the most successful programs are those with a minischool format strengthens our conviction that dropout prevention strategies should use the house plan as their organizing principle, and that to reinforce gains made by students while in alternative programs, the whole school should be restructured around the house plan system. Ultimately, such restructuring would integrate "alternatives" into the fabric of the school and obviate the need for special dropout prevention programs.

For overage students, creating separate houses could (1) make them feel more comfortable by being with others of their own age and interests, (2) allow greater flexibility of schedules, and (3) present opportunity for an integrated curriculum relative to their special needs, addressing a common complaint of students in the alternative programs that courses are dull and irrelevant.

5. FUNDING ISSUES

Any major change in a high school is predicated on its receiving additional funding, but the fragmented and tentative way high school reform has been funded, particularly the house plan, which should be the centerpiece, precludes the kind of continuity needed for school administrators to commit themselves to organizational change. Without a long-term plan reinforced with convincing leadership and sufficient resources, many school officials view the house plan as just one of many reform efforts handed down from above, saying in effect, "This too shall pass." It is difficult to fault them when mostly it's a case of too little money spread too thinly to make any real change possible.

To understand the role of funding in high school reform, an explanation of current practice is in order.

New York City high school budgets are in units, not dollars. One unit is equal to the average teacher's salary, a principal's salary is equal to more than one unit, and a secretary's to less than a unit. Principals are responsible for allocating their units to meet the needs of their students and legal mandates.

The high schools receive units in two portions. First, all schools are given a base allotment for administrative purposes. The second part of the allocation is based on student enrollment with a per capita value assigned to each student. The end result of this formula is that large high schools are not provided with an equitable amount of units, because it is assumed that larger schools cost less to operate. This assumption is based on an "economies of scale" argument.

With regard to the house plan, every high school for the first year received a $3,000 planning grant and, on average, 1.3 units for a school's house plan. During the second year, no funds were specifically allocated for the house plan, leaving funding up to the principals. During the third year (school year 1989-90), the Division of High Schools allocated a total of 49.90 units for the house plan citywide, or, roughly, an average of two units per school. (The source of information is the executive director of the Division of High Schools.)

Thus, except for the three model schools (for the Chancellor Schools) that were charged with developing substantive house plans and thereby received large amounts of supplemental funding to implement them

along with other reforms, funding from the Board of Education for the house plan has been minimal, and large schools have been discriminated against in the allocation of general funds, which might be used for this purpose.

HOUSE SYSTEM COSTS

In an attempt to arrive at a cost figure for instituting a house plan, we received budgetary information from school administrators in charge of the model schools referred to above. Although we tried to distinguish between costs dictated by the house system, itself, and those flowing from other reform concepts, it is not clear that the amounts reported represent necessary costs of the house system.

For example, we found that Brooklyn Large, one of the model schools, spent $386,000 on house-related staff positions. However, house staff coexist with large numbers of other staff, including guidance counselors, deans, program planners, and grade advisors, who retained schoolwide student support responsibilities. In effect, Brooklyn Large now supports two organizational frameworks--the house system along with the traditional structure, naturally, at an augmented expense.

On the other hand, Bronx Intermediate provides a more frugal example of spending in support of the house system. First of all, staff such as dean and guidance counselors were organized around houses; grade advisors were made house coordinators. Federal Chapter 1 monies were redirected from pull-out programs to the newly reorganized academic program under new guidelines that permit funds to be spent on schoolwide reforms in schools where 75 percent of students live in poverty. Specifically, the Chapter 1 funds were used to enhance guidance and reduce class size. Thus, Bronx Intermediate's house plan system was able to operate with no new Board of Education extra funding, although the principal felt funds were needed to support the house extracurricular programs.

This analysis of house system costs serves to point out that house systems can be expensive when they overlay instead of replace the existing organization structure. That is not to say that house systems can be established at no cost, as was argued at one point by the Division of High Schools. Also, we analyzed staff costs only, which represent the largest part of the budget; we made no attempt to factor in the cost of developing extracurricular programs at the house level and making architectural modifications to create physically separate house areas (a one-time cost), nor have we considered the cost of the requisite staff development.

Although to date, funding for the house plan systemwide has been wholly inadequate, last year the Board of Education included in its budget a proposal to increase significantly funding for all high schools, based in part on the premise that an outdated allocation formula did not allow for large high schools to operate houses.

> The current formula represents a minimal level of funding to support mandated needs. As such it was designed with a reduced level of funding for basic support and administrative needs as the size of the school increased. It is now more clearly accepted that for large schools to function well they must design small units (HOUSES), and that often largeness creates unique needs which have to be addressed by enriched supportive services. (Division of High Schools, Internal Memo, November 16, 1988)

Unfortunately, the proposal did not really address the need. The cost of the revised high school allocation formula was to have been $70 million over five years. All high schools were to have received some increase in their budgets. More than half of the budget increment--$40 million--was to have been allocated to provide all schools with additional personnel (including guidance services, extracurricular programs, job developers, and school-based planning), and only $5 million to lessen the negative effects of the "economies of scale" (as student enrollment rises, the cost to educate a student decreases) that is a part of the formula now. All large schools were to have received an increase in their per capita/student funding by this change. Actually, however, this correction in the allocation formula was not put into effect.

Moreover, nothing in the formula change would have required or mandated that high schools have a plan to reorganize into independently operating houses in order to receive these new funds. Principals could still as they do now have allocated money for schoolwide purposes rather than toward the houses, another instance of the Board of Education's failing to follow through on its own pronouncements.

The sad reality is that the house plan system, touted as a primary initiative of the Division of High Schools, was not even projected to receive adequate funding or direction to back up the rhetoric.

CHANCELLOR SCHOOLS FUNDING

In contrast to the funding for systemwide implementation of the house plan system, the five chancellor schools, which were instituted this year, received significant funding--$700,000 each. In some

cases they were also receiving dropout prevention funding, thereby receiving a susbstantial infusion of resources. (The designated schools were required to submit a plan to their respective high school superintendent who, in turn, disbursed the funds to the school. Some schools received their $700,000 in one lump sum, others chose to draw on it throughout the school year.)

This concentration of dropout prevention resources and the intent to use them for schoolwide reform is sound strategy. It should be the first step in a long-term plan that consolidates the various funding streams--federal, state, and city--targeted for dropout prevention so that there are sufficient resources to institute well-designed house plans in our most troubled schools.

6. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S CAPITAL PLAN

The primary goal of the house plan is to combat the negative effects of large schools. In Making Big High Schools Smaller, we recommended that

> high school modernizations scheduled at the zoned high schools should facilitate a house plan--not the academic comprehensive high school model. The dropout prevention high schools scheduled for renovation and modernizations should be given immediate priority. Their plans should be reviewed to support the house plan. (McCabe and Oxley, p. 28)

To date, there has been no concerted effort to make the necessary structural changes to adapt any of the neighborhood high schools to the house plan. Some high schools have attempted to locate groups of students in certain sections of a building, but that is the extent of any physical reorganization. Moreover, modernization plans have not been reexamined to ensure that they reflect a house plan.

During last year, the Board of Education was preoccupied with ensuring the creation of the School Construction Authority to replace the jurisdiction of the Division of School Buildings, and with helping it get launched. Approved by the state legislature in December, 1988, the authority is an independent agency responsible for the design, construction, and remodeling of New York City public schools. In addition, it is exempt from the Wicks Law, a state law requiring separate contractors for each construction task, which exemption is expected to cut in half--from eight to four years--the time it takes to build a school.

The authority is expected to build thirty-four new schools, modernize eighty schools, and make other improvements at several hundred others over a five-year period at a cost of $4.3 billion. Funding for the authority comes from New York City General Obligation Bond Financing and the Municipal Assistance Corporation.

The work of the authority is defined by the Board of Education's Master Plan and Five-Year Capital Plan, the first phase of the Master Plan. Unfortunately, the Master Plan, adopted by the Board of Education in March, 1989, persists in planning the building of big schools without adequate provision for autonomous sub-schools. High schools will seat 2,000 students, middle schools 1,200 or 1,800 students, and elementary schools 600, 900, 1,200 students.

The problem is not solved by the prototype design for the new elementary and middle schools already underway at the School Construction Authority. Under this scheme, a basic neighborhood school design is established using building modules. There are five modules: one each for administration and common facilities (gym, auditorium, cafeteria), and three for classrooms--two for regular education and one for education. These modules are then arranged to fit available building sites. The Board of Education and School Construction Authority contend the prototype will save money in design and building construction costs and make site selection easier.

The deficiency of this design is that it does not create autonomous sub-schools, although it might be adapted to do so. Certainly any design at the high school level that incorporates sharing common facilities without taking in account the physical requirements of a well-designed house plan would undermine the small school concept.

Thus, in approving the $4.3 billion Five-Year Capital Plan as presently constituted, the Board of Education flies in the face of enlightened educational theory and disregards its one chance in almost two decades to seize the opportunity to build schools that meet today's needs. It continues to view the capital budget as separate from the expense/operating budget in its impact upon educational performance.

Despite support from many elected officials to downsize the new schools, the Board continues the direction of building big across the board. As for the high schools, its own capital plan states that the "optimum student population of high schools should be 1,200." Also, during the last legislative session, the New York State Assembly Education Committee agreed on a bill limiting the size of any new high school in New York City to no more than 1,500 students.

Moreover, the Board disregards the views of much of the advocacy community. PEA, for its part, in conjunction with the Architectural League of New York, conducted a school design competition to create innovative settings for small, intimate schools, integrated with community, health, and cultural resources. The results of the competition, exhibited at the Urban Center in Manhattan and the IDCNY in Queens during February, March, and April, 1990, and currently traveling through the boroughs, excited much interest, proving once again what creativity and imagination can do. At the present time, PEA and the Architectural League of New York are doing feasibility studies to determine the practicality of building small schools.

To sum up, it is apparent that the Board of Education has not adequately considered the negative effects of overlarge schools on underachieving and disadvantaged students, either in its plan to build new schools or in its modernization plans for existing schools. Ted Sizer, dean of the School of Education at Brown University, recently said that the greater the problems at home and in the community, the greater is the need for a small, secure, supportive environment at school. Giving lip service to school reform initiatives without revising the building and modernization program to conform to those initiatives makes no sense.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Just as "dropout prevention" was the key term in education circles in the eighties, "restructuring" is the mode for the nineties. Here in New York City as elsewhere across the nation, there is general agreement that the band-aid approach to improving our schools will not work and that nothing less than schoolwide reform is needed.

We are encouraged that the Board of Education is moving in that direction but concerned that there is still no comprehensive strategy that drives method, funding, and the capital plan to one purpose.

We have argued that the house plan should be the centerpiece of plans for restructuring the neighborhood high schools and that dropout prevention programs be part of the whole. Judging from their pronouncements, it would appear that the central authorities are in agreement, yet when it comes to funding, or to building schools to accommodate the small school concept--a key feature of the house plan--the different divisions continue to act is if they were operating in a vacuum, indicating a lack of an overall strategy.

Furthermore, as this report makes clear, resistance at the school level is a major hurdle to be overcome. Equally important is a commitment on the part of central administrators to provide not only technical aid and guidance, but also inspiration.

The following recommendations address these major problems:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Structuring the House Plan:

I. Neighborhood zoned high schools should be reorganized into small houses with restructured staffing patterns and revamped, reorganized curriculum and instructional formats. The high school authorities should affirm the need for these changes, define, and clarify their characteristics and provide technical assistance in implementation to school-based planning teams.

   A. All students, teachers, support staff, and administrative personnel should be organized around the houses.

      1. Students should take core academic courses and receive support services in their houses.

2. Teaching, support, and administrative personnel should be organized around houses instead of academic departments.

B. The chancellor should require that the various centrally supported professional development programs for the high schools focus on shaping and implementing house plans that work with heterogeneous groups of students and provide individualized education and interdisciplinary teaching.

C. Staffing and curriculum arrangements should be modified, if necessary, to permit the assignment of personnel to administrative and coordinating roles based on leadership rather than job titles.

D. Houses should not be used for tracking students by ability; students should be grouped heterogeneously.

E. In the high schools, the chancellor's school-based planning/shared decision-making initiative should focus on house plans. Planning teams should decide such matters as who will coordinate curriculum among and within houses, whether the house plan will be vertical or horizontal, and how to arrange for regular meeting times.

F. Curriculum reform and more effective teaching strategies must be the preoccupation of staff in each house. Arrangements should be made to provide house leaders and other staff with opportunities for collegial interaction in their subject areas and support from subject matter specialists.

G. The borough superintendents should be responsible for assisting schools in the development of house plans. The superintendents should identify ready schools and needy schools and pair them to exchange information. Each superintendent should be responsible for the creation of at least two pairs of these laboratory schools. Two pairs should be added each year.

H. Some problems must be addressed on a citywide basis. In order to resolve the larger issues that surface during restructuring schools into houses, a citywide approach should be taken.

1. An information/advocacy coalition should be formed to work on solving problems and disseminating solutions to all neighborhood schools.

2. The Board of Education should convene a task force, including representatives of the state, borough superintendents, and experienced parent and community advocates to plan and negotiate waiver of regulations that may impede successful implementation of the house plan.

3. The task force should also be charged to study and develop recommendations within one year for modifications to ensure that students entitled to special programs like bilingual education, dropout prevention, Chapter I remediation, and special education can have their entitlements in heterogeneous houses.

4. The house plans must be given sufficient time to prove their efficacy; new evaluation techniques should be developed to identify needed program modifications and measure progress over time.

Providing for Overage and Marginal Students:

II. The restructuring of neighborhood zoned high schools into houses should take account of the special educational needs of overage and marginal students as well as current uncertainty as to how best to meet them.

A. School management teams should be required to develop programs linked with their house plans to help overage students obtain the skills and credentials needed for post-secondary school education education and/or employment. These might include the creation of separate houses for some or all older students; integration of work experience, GED and/or independent study with house programs; appropriate referral of such students to other programs.

B. The division of high schools and the high school superintendents should provide the schools with technical assistance in developing their programs for overage students. This might include negotiating coordination with business, higher education, and community based organizations; development of strategies for pooling

categorical funds to create cohesive programs; and research and evaluation as per C. and D. below.

C. The Board of Education should do longitudinal evaluations of the options for overage students developed by schools, comparing the success of different approaches in enhancing credit accumulation, graduation rates, and attainment of diplomas; strengthening students' skills, employability, admission to college, and self-esteem; and, ultimately, their success in work or further schooling.

D. The Board of Education should encourage specific research to determine whether and under what circumstances overage students benefit from GED programs. This research should compare the educational and post-high school attainments of students with various educational and experiential backgrounds who pursue this alternative; consider options for meeting academic or social needs of students who may be neglected by the GED program; compare costs of this approach; and consider the impact of GED referrals, whether to programs in or out of the regular school building, on the functioning of the schools and their house plans.

Funding the House Plan:

III. House plan development should be funded primarily, though not exclusively, by refocusing existing resources.

A. Three-year development grants should be given toencourage school staff to invest in the program without fear that money will disappear midstream.

B. To speed establishing house plans where most needed, money should be given first to the largest, neediest schools.

C. Categorical funds should be aggregated and programs coordinated to eliminate duplication and to support comprehensive services to each house.

D. To limit additional expenditures, staff on existing lines should be utilized to administer and coordinate houses.

Building Schools for Today's Needs:

IV. The school buildings program should be reoriented to ensure that new high schools are smaller and to facilitate division of new and old high schools into houses.

A. New high schools should be designed for no more than 1,000 students.

B. New high schools should be designed to accommodate autonomous houses (including separate administrative, counseling, student locker, teacher and parent meeting, and core classroom spaces) for not more than 500 students each.

C. School modernization plans should contemplate redesign of existing buildings to accommodate house plans; modernization plans already prepared should be revamped for this purpose.

D. Building large schools should not be the response to overcrowding; more small schools should be built and aggressive rezoning, open enrollment, creative utilization of alternative public space, and leasing of private facilities should be pursued as interim measures.

Appendix

A Comparison of the Effects of Different House Types on Students

Measures*	Mean Score by House Type				Significance Levels
	Loosely Structured/ Large School	Loosely Structured/ Small School	Tightly Structured/ Large School	Tightly Structured/ Intermediate Size School	
Know students (1-5)	2.88	3.17	3.25	3.19	.02
% teachers known	.24	.33	.31	.26	.02
Know house coordinator (1-2)	1.39	1.53	1.47	1.54	.01
Know assistant principal (1-2)	1.19	1.17	1.10	1.12	.07
Know grade advisor/dean (1-2)			1.47	1.17	
Know guidance counselor (1-2)	1.43	1.51	1.19	1.59	.00
Know paraprofessional (1-2)	1.16	1.12		1.15	
# of extracurriculars	2.57	5.89	5.14	9.83	.00
Self-esteem (1-4)	2.74	2.92	3.18	2.91	.09
Sense of community (0-1)	.14	.13	.41	.36	.01
Have cut classes (1-2)	1.57	1.24	1.30	1.52	.00
# of days absent	11.11	12.44	11.52	10.71	.95
Average grade (0-100)	63.06	66.88	67.31	67.50	.28
# of credits	3.43	4.78	4.17	3.96	.05
Was promoted (1-2)	1.43	1.59	1.62	1.78	.03

* Numbers in parentheses indicate score range